
CU Erasmus Students Participate in the Czech Red Cross Humanitarian Training

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For many outside observers, the Erasmus exchange programme appears to be a pleasant stay abroad involving a lot of partying paid for by the EU – and, consequently, our taxes. While this may be true of some Erasmus students, there are also hard workers who are aiming to enrich their CVs not only by participating in the exchange itself but also extracurricular activities offered to them at their host university and in their host country.

In the case of Charles University, Erasmus students regularly participate in internships with the National Library of the Czech Republic, introduce aspects of their home countries to local school children in the frame of the voluntary teaching programme 'Europe Meets School', or write for the English issue of the iForum journal in their free time. This autumn, twenty Charles University Erasmus students additionally volunteered for the national drill of the humanitarian units of the Czech Red Cross.

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This year, the national drill of the humanitarian units was aimed at helping refugees and took place between the 7th and 9th November. Aside from the members of the Czech Red Cross, the fire brigade and municipal police joined forces to train for a possible humanitarian emergency event, with the training financed with aid of grant of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. This exercise was situated in Prague and the nearby town of Jílové u Prahy where the fire brigade had recreated a refugee camp.

The Erasmus students of Charles University participated in the drill on Saturday 8th November, and primarily their participation involved acting as international, non-Czech-speaking refugee and asylum seekers. The students, together with other volunteers, were divided into two groups. The first group were requested to hide in a truck trailer where they were later 'discovered' by the police. The following events involved registration of the 'refugees', who were provided with first aid and transported to the evacuation camp in Jílové u Prahy. Here, the training of the humanitarian units continued through providing all 'refugees' with food, clothing, accommodation and psychosocial assistance, including ensuring that the specific needs of non-Czech speaking refugees or children were fully met. The other group began their day in the Václav Havel Airport in Prague playing a group of refugees whose aircraft was damaged while landing. After taking part in the required procedures at the airport this second group were also transported to Jílové u Prahy where they joined the first group.

One of the Erasmus participants, Lenka Zemančíková from Comenius University in Bratislava, summed the experience up for us: 'From my point of view, the event was well-organised and interesting. As a student of Special Education, I felt it was very educational for me personally and it gave me a great opportunity to get field practice. I am glad I had the opportunity to participate in the training.'